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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
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DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF S/E NATSIOS, AF/SPG  
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SU](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: BLASPHEMY AT THE KHARTOUM INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR

11. (SBU) In a twist on the recent "teddy bear scandal" that saw a British schoolteacher sentenced to prison, pardoned by the President and ultimately expelled from Sudan, two Egyptian booksellers were convicted of insulting Islam by distributing a book allegedly critical of the prophet Mohammad's wife Aisha. The book, entitled "The Mother of the Faithful Eats Her Children," was on display last week at the Khartoum International Book Fair.

12. (SBU) On December 11, Sudanese security forces arrested the two men (the forces supposedly accompanied by members of the Islamic fundamentalist group Ansar al-Sunna), who were in Khartoum representing the well-known Egyptian publishing house al-Madbouli. In one of the speedier trials in Sudanese judicial history, the men were found guilty five days later and sentenced to six months in prison. The men were convicted under the same statute as Ms. Gillian Gibbons, the British schoolteacher. The court in its ruling stated that the men would "be an example to anyone who wishes to insult the Almighty." Three Sudanese book fair employees who were also detained were acquitted.

13. (SBU) Several other titles were also confiscated at the book fair, including one entitled "Darfur: A History of War and Genocide," Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz's "Children of Our Quarter" and a set of books on Wahhabism (apparently found objectionable by the Saudi cultural attach). At last year's fair, all the Iranian book stalls were shut down and their representatives sent back to Teheran.

14. (SBU) In contrast to Ms. Gibbons' case, there have been no street protests or demonstrators calling for the two men to be put to death. While the case has been covered by local media, it has not stimulated the same kind of public outcry nor generated potentially embarrassing international exposure. The two men received the maximum sentence possible under the law, according to the Egyptian Deputy Chief of Mission; the Egyptian Embassy has protested their sentence and has filed an appeal.

POWERS